

Adaptation of Magruder's 2005 American Government

Class Notes

Baldwin County High School

Bay Minette, Alabama

Ch 2, Sec 3

The Critical Period

1. What was the first major attempt to establish a lasting plan of union and government of the 13 North American states who had declared independence from Great Britain?

On November 15, 1777 the *Articles of Confederation (AOC)* were approved by the Second Continental Congress, and submitted for ratification by the 13 states. The AOC, established a “league of friendship” between the 13 states. The *Articles of Confederation* were not ratified definitively until March 1781. To achieve final ratification, all 13 states had to approve. All 13 but Maryland ratified the AOC. On March 1, 1781, Maryland became the 13th state to approve the *Articles of Confederation*.

2. Under the *Articles of Confederation*, the Congress was of what structure?

Congress was unicameral (one-chambered) under the AOC.

2. Each year under the *Articles of Confederation*, Congress would chose what to preside over the Congress?

Congress would choose a President of the Congress. Don't confuse this office with the office of President of the United States. That office was created under the *U.S. Constitution* a few years later.

3. What powers did Congress have under the *Articles of Confederation*?

It could declare war, declare peace, conduct foreign policy, borrow money, establish a monetary system, create a postal system, establish and maintain an army and navy, and establish standards of measurements and weights.

The above list is not exhaustive, but it hits the high points.

4. What were the obligations of the states under the *Articles of Confederation*?

The states were obligated to submit to the laws and policies of Congress duly passed and enacted under the *Articles of Confederation*. The states had to provide troops, and to respect the citizens, records, proceedings of the other states.

There were more, but state obligations were rather minimal.

5. What kind of union between the states was created by the *Articles of Confederation*?

A weak union.

6. What were some of the weaknesses of the *Articles of Confederation*?

The Congress did not have the power to tax, and could only raise money by borrowing and/or begging from the states. After the Revolutionary War, the national government under the *Articles of Confederation* was greatly in debt.

The Congress did not have the power to regulate commerce between the states (i.e. interstate commerce).

Congress did not have the necessary powers to enforce the laws it could make.

Congress needed all 13 state legislatures to approve any amendment (change) to the *Articles of Confederation*.

7. Though the major fighting of the American Revolutionary War ended in October 1781, what action really ended the war, and definitively confirmed the independence of the 13 states?

The Treaty of Paris of 1783 was a treaty that ended the American Revolutionary War, and contained an acknowledgement from Great Britain that each of the 13 states were now free of and independent from the United Kingdom of Great Britain.

To put it another way, the British government declared that the 13 states were now independent.

Think of the *Treaty of Paris of 1783* as Great Britain's "declaration" of American independence. Basically they kinda sorta said that "yep, you are now independent."

8. After the Americans achieved independence, what fundamental problem did the 13 states face?

Basically, the states under the *Articles of Confederation* had to govern themselves effectively. It was an open question as to whether this American union could survive. Would a union of states continue to exist, or would it fall apart?

9. During the years after independence was achieved, how did the American union do under the *Articles of Confederation*?

In many respects, things did not go all that well. Interstate relations were poor. Some states even conducted their own foreign policy.

In short, many concluded that government under the *Articles of Confederation* was failing

10. What was Shays' Rebellion?

Shays's Rebellion was an event in Massachusetts in 1786-1787 in which indebted common folk revolted against government authority. Daniel Shays was a Revolutionary War veteran, and a leader of the revolt

The event might not be all that memorable to us today, but it triggered distress among certain prominent Americans, a distress that led some of them to conclude that significant change had to be made to the way the American union was governed.

11. On January 21, 1787, the Virginia General Assembly called for what?

A meeting of all the states to consider a plan for regulating commerce

12. On September 11, 1786 that meeting occurred in Annapolis, Maryland. What became of it?

It received attendance from representatives of only 5 out of 13 states.

13. What did this poorly attended Annapolis Convention call for?

It called for another meeting, a gathering to happen in May 1787. It called for a meeting devoted to making reforms on behalf of the union of the states.

14. By mid-February 1787, seven states had done what?

Delaware, Georgia, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Virginia had named delegates for the scheduled convention to be held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

15. What happened on February 21, 1787?

Congress called for the states to send delegates to the Philadelphia convention.

16. What were Congress' instructions for the delegates to consider, especially in terms of the *Articles of Confederation*?

To consider “for the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation and reporting to Congress and the several legislatures such alterations”

In other words, Congress wanted to Philadelphia Convention to consider measures that would reform and improve the *Articles of Confederation*.

Congress did not authorize the delegates to the Philadelphia Convention to create a new Constitution and propose that it replace the *Articles of Confederation*.

But as we shall see, that's exactly what the delegates to the Philadelphia Convention did.